

PHILADELPHIA, PA: LCN

The Philadelphia, Pennsylvania faction of La Cosa Nostra has been one of the strongest families in the American Cosa Nostra since its start in 1911. Salvatore Sabella was sent to Philadelphia by the bosses of the Sicilian Mafia to organize the city's rackets. Sabella was the boss of the Philadelphia mob from 1911 until his death in 1927. He was succeeded by Joseph Bruno. Bruno was in power essentially from 1927 until 1946. There was a period during his rule when his power was challenged by John Avena. This was sometime between 1934 and 1936. Bruno retained his power, but died in 1946. Joseph Ida was the family's next boss. He was in control of the family until a narcotics conviction forced him to flee to Sicily in 1959. His successor was Angelo Bruno. Bruno, son of Joseph Bruno, would be the man to put the Philadelphia Mafia on the map. Bruno was one of the men who got Atlantic City started up. He established close contact with the New York families, especially the Genovese family. The Philadelphia mob was raking in more money than the families in cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and Milwaukee. They were only behind the New York and Chicago families in terms of importance to La Cosa Nostra. Angelo Bruno sat on the Mafia's ruling commission. His consigliere, Antonio "Tony Bananas" Caponigro, had been griping to associates about Bruno. He was unhappy that Bruno seldom used violence as a means to achieve his goals. He began plotting to kill Angelo Bruno. His plan coincided with Bruno's assassination on March 21, 1980. He was gunned down as he was riding in a car driven by soldier John Stanfa. Stanfa pulled up to Bruno's house, rolled down the passenger side window, and watched as Bruno was blown away. Stanfa caught bullet fragments on his shoulder, but had no serious injuries. This was one of the biggest mob hits in history. Caponigro was sent to New York for a meeting with the heads of the five families, where a Genovese family crew headed by Vincent "Chin" Gigante strangled and beat Caponigro and associate Alfred Salerno. Meanwhile, Phil Testa had been chosen by the New York families to be the next boss in Philadelphia. He appointed Pete Casella as his underboss. He also chose Nicodemo "Little Nicky" Scarfo as his consigliere. Scarfo had been banished to Atlantic City by Bruno, but he was now back in the picture in Philadelphia. On March 15, 1981, Phil Testa was blown away. Literally. A bomb was hidden under the porch of his duplex. It was detonated by a remote control when Testa was on the porch. The bomb was packed with roofing nails and explosives. Underboss Pete Casella and capo Frank Narducci blamed the attack on the Philadelphia roofers union. They said that this was evident because of the roofing nails in the bomb. Later, it was discovered that Casella and Narducci were behind the killing of Phil Testa. Casella called a meeting of the family and said that he had been cleared by New York to be the next boss of the family. Scarfo didn't believe him, though. Scarfo, on the day of Testa's funeral, went to New York and met with the heads of the Genovese and Gambino families. He learned that no one had approved Casella's ascension to the throne. Scarfo convinced them to proclaim him as the next boss of the family. Scarfo's rule brought more violence to the Philadelphia mob than it had ever seen. In the four years after Bruno's assassination, 30 mobsters and associates were killed in mob-related disputes. Scarfo would be hurt by those whom he thought were loyal to him. He had become a man that could not be trusted. One example of this was Salvatore "Salvie" Testa. Testa was an up and comer in the mob who had been elevated to the rank of capo in the months after his father Phil's death. Testa was extremely violent. Scarfo used him as a hitman in over 15 murders. Then, for some unknown reason, Scarfo thought that Testa was getting jealous of him. He ordered Testa killed. Now, none of Scarfo's closest friends could trust him. He elevated his nephew, Philip Leonetti, to the rank of underboss. He and Leonetti were based in Atlantic City. The two men in Philadelphia running the operations were capo Tommy DelGiorno and Frank "Faffy" Iannarella. Scarfo would eventually be brought down by his own people. From 1987 to 1989, five made members of the Philadelphia mob would become government

informants. They included underboss Philip Leonetti, capo Tommy DelGiorno, capo Lawrence Merlino, soldier Gino Milano, and soldier Nicholas "Nicky Crow" Caramandi. A whole generation of leadership was taken out in an extensive RICO case by the FBI against the Philadelphia mob. Scarfo was convicted in 1989 of the murder of Frank "Frankie Flowers" D'Alfonso. He maintained his control over the family until 1991, but is currently serving two lengthy federal prison sentences. In 1991, the FBI revealed that John Stanfa had taken over the family. He was driving Angelo Bruno home the night that Bruno was shot. Stanfa was criticized by some members of the organization for importing soldiers from his homeland of Sicily. In 1994, he was convicted on narcotics charges and is currently in prison. His successor, and the current boss, is Ralph Natale. Natale is a former president of the Camden County (N.J.) bartenders union, which was the controlling union in Atlantic City. Under him, the family has begun to prosper once again, but it is not even near the power which it once had.

New Update-03/19/98

On March 18, 1998, Anthony Turra was murdered on the steps outside his South Philadelphia home. Turra was the father of reputed Philly drug lord Louis Turra. Louis Turra killed himself early in 1997 while awaiting trial on racketeering charges. The Turras were not a part of the Philadelphia mob. However, Anthony Turra was on trial along with four other men for conspiring to kill reputed underboss Joseph "Skinny Joey" Merlino. It is not clear at this time who the hit on Anthony Turra was supposed to send a message to. It could be a message to all independent drug operators in Philadelphia. Merlino had been upset with the Turras for not giving tribute to the mob. The hit could be a message to Anthony Turra's brother, Rocco. Rocco Turra recently testified against his brother Anthony, saying that he was involved in drugs, but that he never planned to kill Merlino. Rocco said that his brother "couldn't hurt a fly". The killing could also just simply be a message to not mess with Skinny Joey Merlino. At the current time, no suspects have been named by the Philadelphia police, although two associates of Merlino were taken in for questioning on the day of the killing. I will be posting more information on the murder as it becomes available.